



Security Council

Fifty-ninth year

Provisional

4927th meeting

Thursday, 18 March 2004, 10 a.m.
New York

<i>President:</i>	Mr. De La Sablière	(France)
<i>Members:</i>	Algeria	Mr. Baali
	Angola	Mr. Gaspar Martins
	Benin	Mr. Adechi
	Brazil	Mr. Sardenberg
	Chile	Mr. Muñoz
	China	Mr. Zhang Yishan
	Germany	Mr. Trautwein
	Pakistan	Mr. Khalid
	Philippines	Mr. Baja
	Romania	Mr. Dumitru
	Russian Federation	Mr. Smirnov
	Spain	Ms. Menéndez
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Thomson
	United States of America	Mr. Cunningham

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, and in the absence of objection, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Danilo Türk, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite Mr. Türk to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Danilo Türk, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Türk: Since the Secretariat last briefed the Security Council, the Middle East has seen an increase in violence, death and suffering. At the same time, the small window of opportunity for restarting the peace process, described last month by Mr. Roed-Larsen, remains open.

In the aftermath of last Sunday's suicide bombing, Israeli Prime Minister Sharon called off his planned meeting with Palestinian Prime Minister Qurei. We urge the two men to meet. The bloody stalemate that has characterized the peace process for too long will be broken only when the parties meet at the highest level and begin to work together to implement the Quartet's road map. Their partnership is the essential base on which the peace process must be built. We hope that the meeting will be rescheduled in the very near future.

It is important for both parties to recognize that the aim of those who carry out attacks as repugnant as the recent suicide bombings is to ensure that their agenda of violence, rather than an Israeli-Palestinian peace process, dominates the scene. Those who would

end decades of conflict between Palestinians and Israelis have little choice but to carry on in the face of violence and terrorism.

Despite the rise in violence, the possibility of peace remains open. Prime Minister Sharon's welcome announcement of his decision to withdraw the Israeli presence from the Gaza Strip has attracted substantial attention during the period under review. That proposed initiative could be a positive contribution to the search for peace. To garner the broad support of the international community and strengthen its chances for success, the withdrawal should have four main features.

First, it should be carried out as part of the Quartet's road map, which remains, despite a lack of implementation, the only plan to which the parties and the international community subscribe. Secondly, it should occur in consultation and in partnership with the Palestinian Authority — the only partner for such an action. Thirdly, the withdrawal should be full and complete. Finally, it should be considered by all as a first step towards the fulfilment of the United Nations call on the Government of Israel to end its occupation, as set forth in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002). At this juncture it would be important that the Government of Israel provide a timetable for the withdrawal.

For their part, Quartet envoys met on 10 March in Washington, D.C., to discuss the possible Gaza Strip withdrawal and other relevant issues in the region. They agreed to work to plan a Quartet principals' meeting in the next few months, and considered ways to revitalize the Quartet and its road map process in the current situation. The Quartet's revitalization is important, as is the contribution of countries of the region. We applaud the untiring efforts of Egypt in that regard.

All these efforts are taking place while violence continues unabated. Since the last briefing to the Security Council, 101 people have lost their lives to the conflict — 80 Palestinians and 21 Israelis. This brings the death toll since September 2000 to 946 Israelis and 3,245 Palestinians.

The toll from Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip has grown in the past several months. Especially disturbing is the number of civilians, including children, who are killed and wounded in such actions. In addition Israel carried out extrajudicial

killings during the reporting period. We wish to restate our opposition to such unlawful acts and call on the Government of Israel to cease this policy, which too often results in the death or injury of civilian bystanders.

Israel has a duty to protect its citizens from terrorist attacks that emanate from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. It has a concomitant responsibility under international law to protect the lives of the civilians in the territory it occupies. Thus, in the aftermath of an operation carried out on 7 March in a densely populated part of the Gaza Strip that resulted in the deaths of 14 — including several children — the Secretary-General called on the Government of Israel to abide by its obligations under international humanitarian law to avoid civilian casualties and to desist from the use of disproportionate force in densely populated areas. We wish to restate that such acts must cease.

The reporting period has also seen a continuation of terrorist attacks targeted at Israeli civilians. On 22 February, a suicide bomb exploded on a bus in Jerusalem, killing eight and wounding more than 60. On 14 March, a double suicide bombing in Ashdod killed at least 10 and injured 16.

We repeat our condemnation of such attacks in the strongest terms. No cause can justify such acts. We call on the Palestinian Authority to take up its security responsibilities under the road map. It is imperative that those who plan, carry out and facilitate terrorist acts be brought to justice.

We urge the Palestinian Authority to address the challenges to security. Reform of the Authority security services, as called for in the road map, is essential for peace.

The humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory continues to be seriously negatively affected by Israeli security measures. Living conditions of Palestinians, including their access to health, education, food and employment, have been seriously diminished by ongoing movement restrictions, military incursions and house demolitions, particularly in Rafah, where almost 10,000 Palestinians have been made homeless.

While the crisis continues unabated, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), may soon be

obliged to severely cut back its emergency activities due to a sharp drop in its emergency funding. Of the \$193 million in emergency funding requested for 2004, only \$45 million has been pledged so far, and the prospects for further contributions are uncertain. The Agency's extensive emergency work to date has been essential to the 1.6 million Palestine refugees in the occupied Palestinian territory, of whom 1.1 million have been receiving emergency food aid from UNRWA. Any further drop in its delivery of food and other emergency aid would quickly cause already depressed socio-economic indicators to further fail dramatically.

The Palestinian Authority's financial crisis continues. In January, according to the Authority, domestic revenues declined to less than \$12 million, which is considerably lower than the annual monthly average for the year 2003. Donor funds made up for the shortfall in revenues. As we have previously pointed out, donor support was initially envisaged as development assistance in anticipation of the establishment of a Palestinian State. Donors did not contemplate providing long-term budgetary assistance to maintain the Authority. However, the ongoing conflict has significantly altered those initial expectations.

During most of the reporting period, West Bank barrier construction and related land levelling continued at a rapid pace in sections around Jerusalem and Ramallah. Last week, however, the Israeli High Court of Justice extended a freeze until 17 March on construction of a section north-west of Jerusalem to examine petitions brought by eight Palestinian villages. This week, the Court ordered the Government to respond to petitioners' claims that the Barrier harms Palestinian villagers. The Government agreed to modify certain plans and to negotiate with villagers regarding others. Members of the Security Council are also aware of the current proceedings before the International Court of Justice, which is considering an advisory opinion on the matter of the barrier.

Israeli authorities started on 22 February to dismantle the eight kilometres of barrier that isolates the villages of Baqa al-Sharqiya and Nazlat Issa from the rest of the West Bank. Three gates, including one agriculture gate in Zayta, were taken down, allowing freer access for farmers to land in the area. We welcome this development, but reiterate our call to the

Government of Israel not to build the barrier on Palestinian land.

In south Lebanon, we remain concerned about the improvised explosive device planted by Hizbullah along the Blue Line near Ramyah, which the Israeli Defence Forces attempted unsuccessfully to remove in January. The placement of improvised explosive devices along the Blue Line poses a threat to international peace and security. These devices are dangerous and can disrupt stability in the area. They also pose a direct threat to United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) soldiers and to the local populations on both sides of the Line. UNIFIL and the Personal Representative of the Secretary-General for southern Lebanon are continuing to pursue this matter with the Lebanese authorities.

Israeli air violations of Lebanon's airspace also continue to be of concern. On 10 March, the Secretary-General's Personal Representative issued a statement critical of those acts, after six air violations were recorded. Seven rounds of anti-aircraft fire emanating from the Lebanese side of the Line were also recorded. Both parties must be urged to refrain from these activities, which can provoke incidents and, in the case of the live fire, also pose a risk to human lives.

The problem of the Iraqi Kurdish migrants temporarily accommodated at the Naqoura crossing was resolved earlier this month by the Kurds agreeing to a voluntary transfer to another location inside Lebanon, there to await possible repatriation to Iraq. The relocation was effected by the Lebanese internal security forces in consultation with UNIFIL, the Secretary-General's Personal Representative and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Major General Alain Pellegrini assumed his position as UNIFIL Force Commander on 18 February.

We welcome him and look forward to working with him to fulfil the mandate from the Security Council in south Lebanon.

The situation in the Golan Heights remains calm. At this point, President Assad continues to hold out his offer to resume peace negotiations with Israel. We hope that Israel will take up that opportunity. It is important that the parties soon begin to work towards a peace agreement based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1515 (2003).

At the last briefing, Mr. Roed-Larsen spoke of the parties' having another chance for peace. I reiterate his call for seriousness of purpose in implementing the road map on the part of the parties as well as of the international community. We in the international community, in particular the partners that make up the Quartet, must do everything in our power to assist the parties to move back to the negotiating table. We hope that the Gaza Strip withdrawal initiative, which earlier this week was approved by Israel's Knesset, is the bold step necessary to restart the peace process.

As we said last month, there is an urgency to address this problem. Violence continues to take too many lives. It is in the interest of all of us - Israelis, Palestinians and all members of the international community - to work quickly and earnestly to implement the road map to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003).

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Danilo Türk for his briefing.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I should now like to invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.